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JAPANESE RESPONSES TO THE 3rd ARMITAGE-NYE REPORT

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On August 15, a bipartisan group led by former US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Harvard professor Joseph Nye published the 3rd Armitage-Nye report: "The US-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia."

The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.


The report begins by declaring that the US-Japan alliance is at a “time of drift” and “endangered.” There seems to be a wide perception gap between the United States and Japan, given Prime Minister Noda’s assessment at the US-Japan Summit meeting in May that “the alliance has reached new heights.” There is also a big difference from the past two reports published in 2000 and 2007 that expected the US-Japan alliance could develop like the Anglo-US alliance.

The 3rd report asks whether Japan desires to continue to be a “tier-one nation,” or is content to drift into “tier-two status.” If Japan chooses the latter option, the report is of no use. It is a question of “Japan’s disposition” and, if Japan remains a tier-one nation, the United States expects Japan to stand shoulder-to-shoulder as an ally. The report concludes Japan has sufficient power and influence to do so.

The report happened to be published when Hong Kong-based activists landed on the Senkaku Islands and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak demanded apologies from the Emperor. The report’s recommendations can serve as a message not only to Japan but also to South Korea. Concerning Japan-South Korea relations, the report emphasizes the necessity of turning attention to the immediate common threat from China instead of allowing historical issues to undermine bilateral relations. The report then proposes that Japan confront the historical issues and recommends that the bilateral historical problems be resolved through Track II Japan-Korea-US dialogues. The report also recommends the early conclusion of the Japan-South Korea General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA).

The analysis on China is pessimistic, unlike the past reports. China is now facing a period of social and economic change. Its future path is unpredictable and the chance of domestic disunion cannot be ruled out. In such a scenario, this report assumes, the Chinese leadership would inflame nationalist sentiments while infringing still further on human rights. It therefore recommends that Japan utilize its national power and influence to prepare for such a case. In addition, the report proposes pursuing an A2/AD strategy for US

carrier strike groups and responding to the Chinese Navy's expansion beyond the first island chain with the US military's concept of Air-Sea Battle and the Japan Self-Defense Forces' "dynamic defense." The report calls for greater interoperability between the US military and the Self-Defense Forces, with particular emphasis on coordination between the US Marine Corps and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force to deepen cooperation in amphibious operations. Other recommendations include Self-Defense Force minesweeping operations in the Persian Gulf and US-Japan joint surveillance in the South China Sea. Cooperation in nuclear and other energy fields, arms exports, and cyber security are recommendations of a new kind.

Japan has lifted earlier restrictions on security policy by shifting force posture southeastward, relaxing the three principles on arms exports, and revising its basic nuclear and space laws. The remaining issue is that of collective self-defense, which was referred to in past Armitage-Nye reports. Also, despite severe fiscal constraints, it is of course necessary for Japan to increase its defense budget and Self-Defense Force personnel. The Armitage-Nye report was published before the presidential election, which means this report has every potential to provide guidance on Japan for the next US administration. Those recommendations are worth considering. 

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